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# The Tiber Valley Project: the Tiber and Rome through two millennia

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*In 1997 a new collaborative research project was initiated by the British School at Rome. This project draws on a variety of sources of archaeological information to explore the regional impact of the City of Rome throughout the period from 1000 BC to AD 1300. The project provides a common collaborative research framework which brings together a range of archaeologists and historians working in various institutions. In this paper those involved in different aspects of this new project outline their work and its overall objectives.*

## Introduction

An understanding of the development of settlement in the Tiber valley is central to any understanding of Rome, its place in the ancient world and the development of European civilization (Potter 1979; Morley 1996). The expansion of Rome towards the north took place during the 1st millennium BC in competition with Sabines, Faliscans and Etruscans. On the west bank of the Tiber, these peoples were focused on urban communities of varied size, such as Veii (190 ha) in the Etruscan region to the south and the smaller centres of Nepi and Falerii Veteres in the Faliscan region to the north (FIGURE 1). On the east bank, the landscape included urban nucleations such as Cures and Crustumerium. The valley was at first divided into a series of discrete territories divided by political and ethnic affinity. Towards the end of the millennium, these urban communities became subject to Rome and were reshaped, manipulated and reworked, by a range of political strategies, to become a key part of the core of Rome's territorial base. Integration broke down the distinctions between Rome, neigh-

bouring peoples and their individual city territories. At the same time that the region developed a cultural unity, social differentiation was spatially restructured. The lands and buildings of rich and powerful members of the élite became increasingly dominant through the elaboration of urban monuments like those at Oriculum and in the palatial villas like that at Lucus Feroniae. With the decline of the Roman world from the 4th century AD, the valley again came to be divided into a series of separate territorial units dominated by the Roman-Byzantines, the Papacy, the Lombards and the Carolingians. The reformulation of these territories and their relationships with Rome and the Church formed a context for the emergence of the city states of Medieval Italy. During the course of just over 2000 years (1000 BC–AD 1300), the Tiber was transformed from a communication artery of local importance to a focal point in the life of Europe, only to return to its former status as an artery of merely regional significance. Yet this was not a complete reversion — the focal role of Rome and the Tiber is still retained today in our collective political memory.

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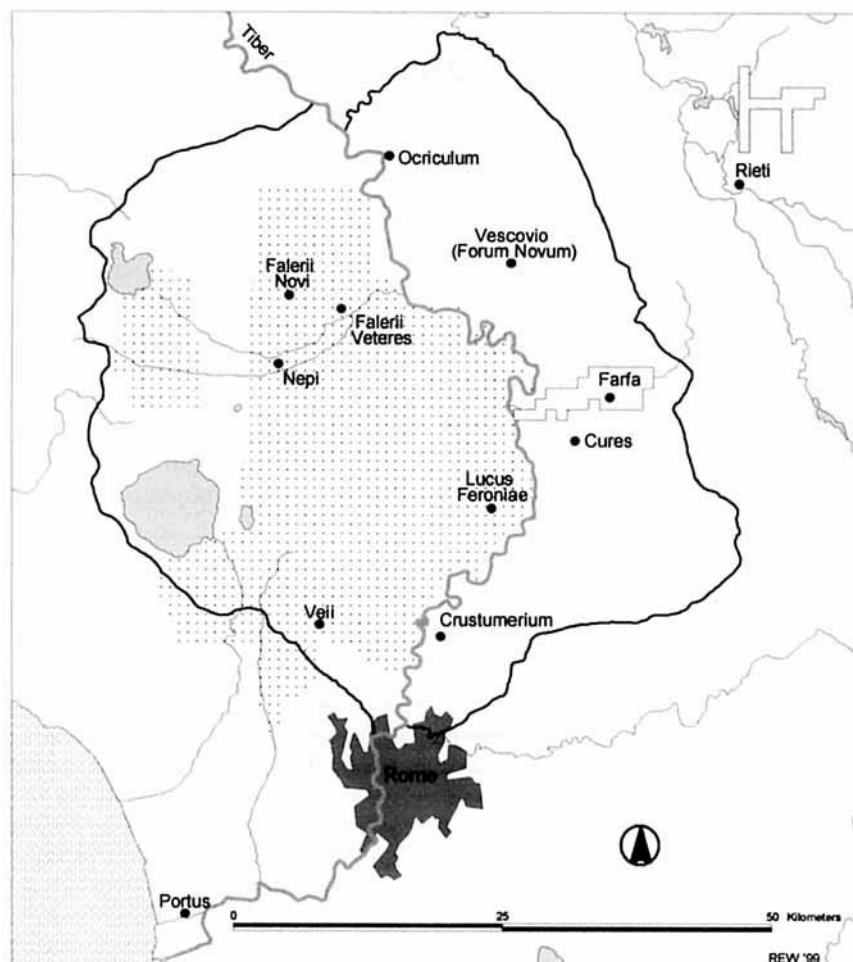


FIGURE 1. *The Tiber Valley project study area defined by the black line, showing the location of sites and survey areas mentioned in the text. Stippled area = South Etruria survey.*

Archaeology provides the only means of exploring these processes in greater detail, tracing the development of different peoples and regions within the valley in relation to these broader historical trends over a long time span. The foundations for this work were laid by the South Etruria survey (Potter 1979) but this work now needs to be enhanced and expanded in the light of new data and ideas. To this end the British School at Rome (BSR) began an initiative in 1997 which has brought together British and Italian archaeologists and historians with research interests in this area under a common research umbrella where co-ordination and sharing of information are the key themes. A first colloquium was held in March 1997 when research priorities were debated and an agreement was made to go forward with a major

collaborative research project to write a new materially based history of the Tiber valley throughout the period 1000 BC–AD 1300. A further colloquium was held in February 1998 at which these ideas were refined. The colloquium of February 1999 presented the first results, and these have recently (February 2000) been updated. A volume of essays arising from these meetings will synthesize existing data and provide a sound starting point for the next stage of detailed research (Patterson in press).

The project has three principal over-arching objectives:

- To produce a new materially based history of the Tiber valley as the hinterland of Rome from 1000 BC–AD 1300, investigating the impact of the growth, success and decline of Rome on its hinterland and the

changing effects of the city and river on settlement, economy and cultural identity.

- To develop the potential of comparative survey for writing a materially based history of the hinterland of Rome. The project will use new analytical methods which permit the comparison and integration of archaeological survey data. Archaeological information will thus be employed to help develop our understanding of settlements, providing new insights into status and economies as well as establishing chronologies.
- The development of novel approaches to the study of urban-rural relationships in the hinterland of Rome, one of the world's first metropolises, based on the latest information technology. The fundamental tool of the analysis will be a Geographical Information System (GIS) integrating the wide range of archaeological and environmental databases.

The BSR has obtained a Leverhulme Research grant to fund the core of this work but in addition various project collaborators are developing complementary research as outlined below. A fuller account of the background, together with a more extensive bibliography has appeared elsewhere (Patterson & Millett 1998). The key strands are: a reassessment of the surface survey evidence from the BSR's surveys undertaken in South Etruria on the west bank of the Tiber during the 1950s and 1960s; a synthesis of the results of a variety of other British and Italian survey projects; renewed survey in the Sabina on the east bank of the river centred on a new excavation at the site of Forum Novum-Vescovio; the development of a GIS of the region integrating survey results with environmental data; and an extensive surface survey of a range of Roman urban sites in the valley. These different elements are designed to focus on complementing the extensive work already being undertaken by a range of scholars in this region many of whom are also contributing to the forthcoming synthesis (Patterson *in press*).

### Survey re-evaluation and synthesis

The BSR's surveys of South Etruria in the 1950s and 1960s were amongst the first anywhere in Europe to capitalize on the potential of surface survey to write landscape histories (Potter 1979). The importance of re-evaluating and compu-

terizing the surveys of the BSR was first realized in the 1980s (di Gennaro & Stoddart 1982; David Whitehouse pers. comm.), but it was not until the early 1990s that the first formulation was devised (Carver & Stoddart *n.d.*). As a result of this formulation, the paper archive was entered into a database and linked to a basic record of the artefacts preserved in the BSR. Strategies for employing new computerized technologies and achieving re-evaluation have been proposed (Stoddart *et al.* 1996; Belcher *et al.* *in press*). In particular, an investigation of the spatial and topographical location of artefacts held in the database has been performed using a geographical information system. However, it was with the commencement of the Tiber Valley project, an initiative of the Director of the School, Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, that the School channelled its resources into taking this preliminary analysis forward to a full re-evaluation. It was clear that the potential of the information could only be realized after full re-examination of the artefacts themselves. In particular advances in the understanding of ceramic traditions in the area since the 1960s meant that much new information could be derived from a re-examination of the pottery by a team of period specialists. At the BSR in February 1997 a team of 12 ceramic specialists began work on the material. The re-evaluation of more than 3000 sites has now been one-quarter completed. The work has already radically changed our views of the development of Veii, the chief rival to Rome for supremacy of the Tiber region.

The study of *c.* 5800 diagnostic sherds of pottery recovered from this site alone has provided new information on the extent and spatial organization of the centre throughout its long history, from the Iron Age through to the early Middle Ages. *Circa* 70 concentrations of material have been analysed from Veii, of which 41 relate to the Iron Age, 70 to the Etruscan period, 68 to the Roman period and 2 to the early Middle Ages. The analysis of the distribution of the concentrations and of the material itself has demonstrated how the settlement pattern on the plain changed through time, passing from a phase in which the most densely occupied areas were those near the edge of the plateau (FIGURE 2), to phases in which, especially from the Etruscan period, the evidence shows three great concentrations of settlement

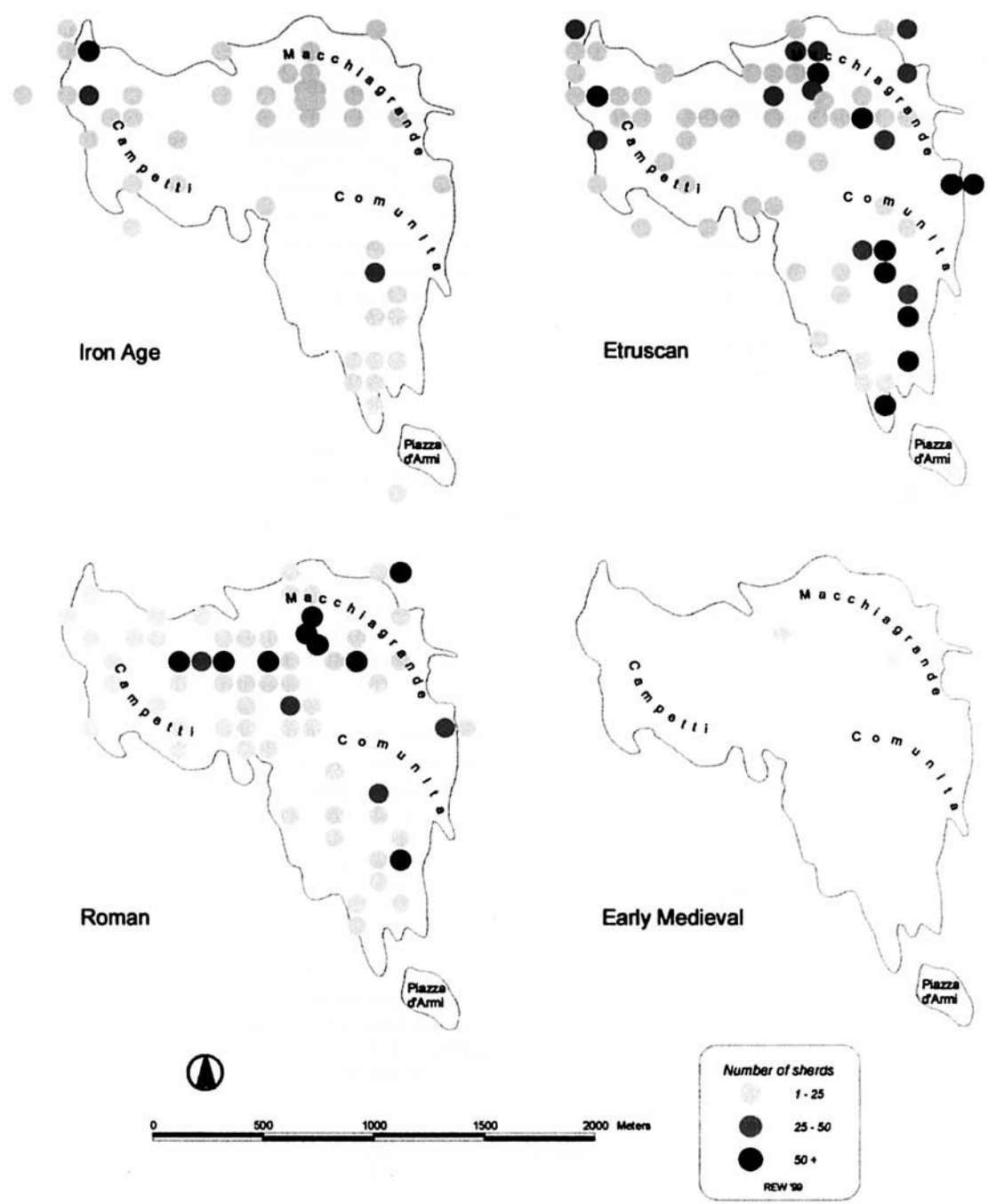


FIGURE 2. Veii: pottery densities of the four principal chronological periods in relation to the plain of Veii enclosed by the Etruscan walls.

in the areas of Macchiagrande, Comunità and Campetti (FIGURE 2). Here the analysis of the material has permitted the identification of

sanctuary or cult areas, production areas and probable areas of habitation. It is interesting to note the continuity in use of many of these ar-

eas following the Roman conquest of Veii, in particular as regards cult areas which are maintained until at least the late Republican period.

The study of the surface material collected from Veii has recovered evidence for ceramic production centres of both the Etruscan and Roman periods. For example, we have secure archaeological indicators for a production centre of black glaze ware (*vernice nera*) in operation between the end of the 4th century and the first half of the 3rd century BC, unknown until now. In the Roman period there are clear signs of a contraction both in areas showing evidence of settlement — the number of settlements and the density of the material from the second half of the 3rd century BC. In this period the surface material is concentrated around the crossing of the two main road axes of the plain where the *municipium* of the Augustan period was situated.

The rest of the plain is characterized by a progressive ruralization demonstrated by the presence of scattered villas and farms which, in some cases, remain in use until the 6th to 7th centuries AD (FIGURE 2, early medieval).

A new phase of work is taking place in the territory of Nepi, a smaller Faliscan neighbour of Etruscan Veii. Here known sites will be re-surveyed and the territory re-examined to assess the state of evidence for this territory, drawing on epigraphic and funerary data to reconstruct the broader ideological landscape which successfully resisted the advance of Etruscan Veii, but not that of Rome. Other integrative themes are emerging as the project develops, including studies of epigraphy, roads and building materials, and a series of themes relating to the post Roman period including studies of *castelli*, churches and rural cemeteries.

### **The impact of Rome**

Work on the Roman towns in the Tiber valley is designed to address key issues about the nature of Roman urbanism. Whilst there has been a considerable amount of research into individual Roman towns we remain remarkably ignorant of overall patterns of urbanism anywhere in the Empire. Previous work has involved either the excavation of individual structures at particular sites or, more rarely, the investigation of single towns (like Pompeii or Ostia) which are exceptionally well preserved. As a result our knowledge of the development of Roman

urban systems in particular areas of the Roman world is highly fragmentary and too often dominated by the same sites which are almost certainly atypical. The development of surface survey methodologies over the past few years now makes it possible to envisage collecting comparative data from a series of sites within a region in order to investigate and characterize the various patterns of urbanism. The Tiber is an ideal region for such a project because of the concentration of complementary work on the Roman rural landscape. As a result it should be possible to place the towns investigated into their landscape context. This work will also provide a powerful new tool for researching Roman impact on settlement systems at an early stage in her expansion.

The aim is thus to enhance our understanding of the patterns of Roman urbanism in this crucial area at the centre of the Roman world through the application of a full variety of surface survey methods (field-walking, magnetometry and resistivity, microtopographic survey), supplemented in some projects by excavation. Specifically, it is intended to study a full range of nucleated sites (from small roadside settlements to large towns), analysing the settlement topography, chronological development and 'place' within overall settlement and economic patterns. In this way it is hoped a new perspective on Roman urbanism will be provided, complementing previous large-scale excavations.

Since 1997 surface survey work has been undertaken at Falerii Novi, Otricoli (Otriculum) and Portus, whilst combined survey and excavation has begun at Forum Novum. All are green-field sites with a high potential for surface survey. The first three sites are being examined by survey alone as part of a programme to gather comparative information from a full range of nucleated sites. They represent different aspects of urbanism, Otriculum having been an important river port which still has an impressive array of public buildings of the Imperial period. It had become an ally of Rome around the end of the 4th century BC. In contrast, Falerii Novi was a new town constructed after 241 BC following Rome's destruction of Falerii Veteres and Portus was the principal port at the mouth of the Tiber developed as a state project from the Claudian period onwards.

At Otriculum only two small areas on the margins of the city were examined. To the south

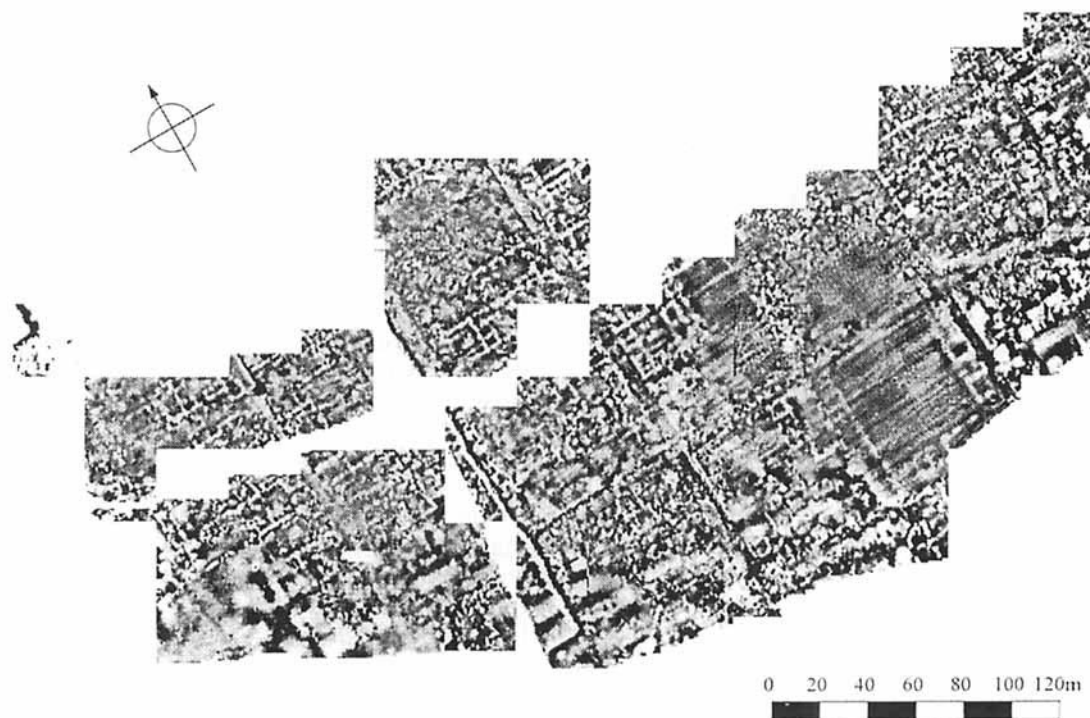


FIGURE 3. Preliminary results of a part of the magnetometry survey of Falerii Novi. The image shows a series of insula blocks and public buildings including, on the right, the previously excavated theatre fronted by a large colonnaded courtyard.

of the town beside the via Flaminia the results were negative because of adverse soil conditions. On the western side of the town, beside the Porto dell'Olio, subsurface features were detected but too small an area was suitable for survey to provide meaningful results. In future years it is hoped to carry out geophysical survey within the town itself.

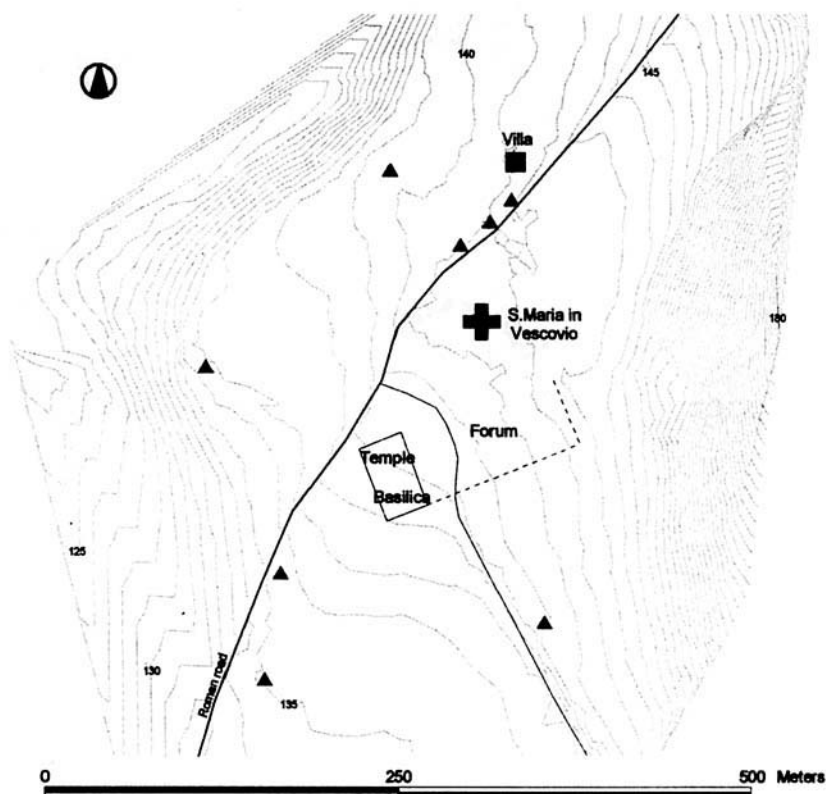
At Falerii Novi the bulk of the 26 ha enclosed by the walls has already been surveyed. Effort was divided between detailed topographic survey, magnetometry and sample surface collection. Resistivity survey proved less effective than magnetometry on this site. A total station survey was used to produce 10-cm surface contours providing an exceptionally detailed analysis of the area. This method has enabled a series of street lines and building platforms to be identified and also produces an unparalleled picture of the microtopography of the site. The magnetometer survey provides a complementary view, showing a mass of hitherto unknown and unexcavated buildings (FIGURE 3). In the final report the structures revealed by the geo-

physics will be enhanced through being shown against the microtopographic survey.

A provisional interpretation of the results complements and modifies the plan published by Di Stefano Manzella (1979). The line of via Amerina can be traced from the south gate towards the forum area. On either side of this road the town is divided into square insulae c. 70 m across. Although some areas are partially obscured by what are probably 18th-century spoil heaps, all *insulae* appear to have been densely occupied. There are clearly visible house plans as well as a full array of public buildings. These include the forum, the previously excavated theatre and a large colonnaded courtyard together with a series of temples. Complementary work is also being undertaken outside the walls to the north of the town to examine the suburbs and funerary monuments.

Since November 1998 extensive work has begun on the major port and town at Portus at the mouth of the Tiber. This work will eventually provide a contrast with the eventual results from the river port of Otricoli further

FIGURE 4. *Plan of the area of Forum Novum-Vescovio showing features mentioned in the text with 1-m contours derived from microtopographic survey. Solid triangles = mausolea.*



upstream. The work is being conducted in collaboration with the Soprintendenza di Archeologica di Ostia who are preparing to open part of the site as an archaeological park. So far work has concentrated on providing a topographic and magnetometer survey of the areas around the northern, eastern and southern sides of the Port of Trajan. Work to complete this survey including the little understood later Roman town continues in 1999.

Work on the east side of the Tiber at Forum Novum is revealing a strikingly different form of Roman urbanism. Forum Novum lies at the head of a broad river valley which leads into the Tiber. Little systematic archaeological work has been done in this area either on the town itself, or on its valley. Excavations carried out in the 1970s revealed the basilica, part of the forum and a temple complex, the results, however, have never been fully published, and what we know of the history of the town comes mainly from the epigraphic evidence (Filippi 1989).

The project combines remote sensing (resistivity, magnetometer and georadar) with exca-

vation to examine the organization and extent of the Roman town and later early medieval bishopric, its development through time and its relationship with the surrounding territory. In particular Forum Novum offers a valuable opportunity to study developments during the late Roman and early medieval periods. Excavations on the east bank of the Tiber have, so far, failed to identify a well-stratified sequence for this crucial period which consequently is little understood.

In common with other Roman urban centres in this area, Forum Novum has no town walls and the aim of the first season, in 1997, was to define the extent of the town. Resistivity and magnetometry carried out over 8 ha indicated that, despite its municipal status, Forum Novum was a very small centre of low population density and limited largely to public buildings, contrasting markedly with the evidence from Falerii Novi (FIGURE 4).

One of the main problems is that much of the town appears to lie underneath the church of Santa Maria in Vescovio itself and modern



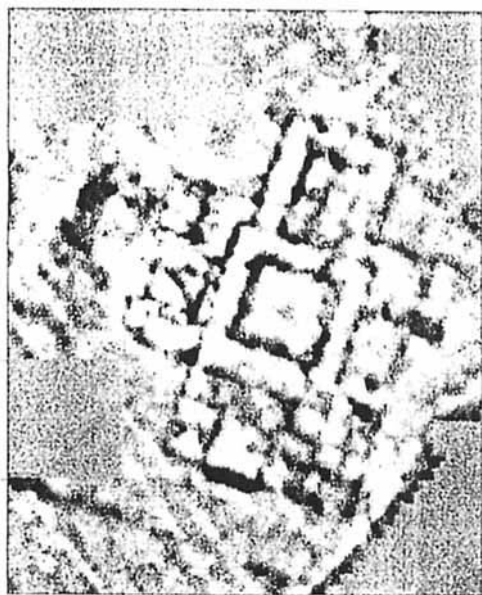


FIGURE 5. Preliminary results of the resistivity survey of the villa at Forum Novum. The villa measures c. 50 x 70 sq. m.

structures (roads, car parks and buildings). As geophysical survey is impossible in these conditions, georadar survey was carried out in July 1998 to the southwest of the forum complex, in an area which is now a gravel-surfaced carpark. The results were spectacular, revealing the clear image of a complex of axial, linear structures, possibly fronted by a colonnade respecting a road, with room divisions and doorways clearly visible.

The most striking result of the 1997 geophysics survey was the identification of a large Roman villa (c. 70 x 50 m), about 300 m from the forum and just outside the town (FIGURE 5). The geophysics results showed a clear plan of four main suites of rooms around a central courtyard measuring 20 x 20 m. Excavations begun in 1998, however, suggest that the villa revealed by the geophysical survey was probably never completed. Nevertheless two areas of the complex have yielded definite evidence of use throughout the mid to late Empire and in late antiquity, including refuse deposits of the 3rd and 4th centuries AD and a number of *cappuchin* or tile burials. The latest evidence for use or frequentation of the site is of the 5th and possibly 6th centuries.

Future seasons will see the continuation of

the georadar survey, the completion of the microtopographic survey and further excavation of selected areas of the site. This will be complemented by field survey of the valley to provide information on the relationship of the town with its hinterland and Rome.

## Conclusion

This project is innovative in both its objectives and its organization. Whilst attempting to transcend the geographical and chronological boundaries which have often characterized research in this area, the BSR is also planning a medium-term research strategy which attempts to build bridges between those with complementary research interests. The Tiber has been both a boundary and a unifying artery. The present project bridges the historical transition between the first and second.

*Acknowledgements.* The Tiber Valley project is carried out in collaboration with the Soprintendenze Archeologiche di Etruria meridionale, Lazio, Ostia, Roma and Umbria. It now involves scholars from 10 British universities and institutions and from a number of Italian academic institutions. Scholars participating in the project whose contributions are not included in this paper are cited here.

The Leverhulme grant funds two research fellows for three years to work on the Tiber Valley project. Helga di Giuseppe is collating the evidence relating to settlement, landscape and communication history to create the spatial framework. Rob Witcher will input the datasets into a GIS to form a regional picture of the cultural and physical landscape of the Tiber valley.

The artefact team in the British School at Rome consists of Francesco di Gennaro and Andrea Schiapelli for the protohistoric pottery; Marco Rendeli, Roberta Cascino, Maria Teresa di Sarcina, Marta Sansoni and Marta Solinas for the Etruscan pottery; for the Roman pottery Sergio Fontana, Helga di Giuseppe, Fabrizio Felici and Massimo Pentiricci, and for the medieval pottery Helen Patterson.

The Nepi region project, which started in Autumn 1999, is directed by Simon Stoddart and Ulla Rajala.

The integrative teams comprise the following: John Patterson is coordinating the study of the epigraphic evidence from the area, Ray Laurence is looking into the Roman road system, building materials are being studied by Amanda Claridge, Will Clarke, Janet DeLaine and Shawn Graham. Scholars developing themes relating to the early medieval and medieval periods include Orsola Amore, Paolo Delogu, Vincenzo Ficocchi Nicolai, Tersilio Leggio, Susanna Passigli and Antonio Sennis.

Work at Falerii Novi, Oriculum and Portus is directed by Simon Keay and Martin Millett and forms part of their broader study of Roman urban settlement systems in the Tiber valley. Work at Forum Novum-Vescovio is directed by Vince Gaffney, Helen Patterson and Paul Roberts.

The georadar survey at Falerii Novi was carried out by Dean Goodman (University of Miami), Yasushi Nishimura (Nara Cultural Institute, Japan) and Salvatore Piro (Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche).

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